From Blogosphere to Social Commerce: A Laddering Analysis of Sellers’ Motivation

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Abstract

Although the field of social commerce has gained a lot of attention recently, there are many areas that still remain unexplored. One of these gaps is the growing use of social commerce by micro businesses. This paper explores the factors that motivate members of a virtual community to venture into business-related activities (i.e. selling goods and services to other community members and/or writing product reviews). Laddering and observation were used to collect data from 21 members in order to investigate this phenomenon. We found that as well as the motivation to increase profits and ensure business sustainability, members were also driven by a sense of virtual community. From the sellers’ perspective, their participation in the virtual community has a significant impact on their business in terms of the support they receive from members, in addition to the obvious business advantages of using social media such as convenience and cost effectiveness.

1. Introduction

The emergence of Web 2.0 and associated developments has encouraged Internet users to create their own content and resulted in a growth in the number of virtual communities. From an e-commerce perspective, Web 2.0 has created new opportunities for reaching customers as well as promoting products. Web 2.0 technologies, such as social media, represent a paradigm shift for the marketing and advertising communities [1, 2].

Kaplan & Haenlein [3] claim that social media allows firms to engage in timely and direct end-consumer contact at relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency than can be achieved with more traditional communication tools. This makes social media relevant for all types of business from large multinational firms to small and medium sized companies.

The term social commerce that introduced the concept of user generated content features, was first coined in 2005 by Yahoo! Inc. It allowed customers to comment and review products on the ‘Yahoo! Pick List’ [4, 5]. Since then, several attempts have been made by academic researchers and practitioners to define social commerce. At present, there is still debate regarding the definitions and scope of social commerce. Stephen and Toubia [6] define it as the marketplace where the individual sellers, instead of firms; are connected with each other through social networks, whilst Decker [7], Pagani & Mirabello [8], Gregordis [9] and Rubel [4] define it as a community of shoppers who share knowledge and sources on product information, which also includes assistance from trusted individuals on goods and services, sold online. Others define it as a subset of e-commerce that involves the use of social media to support social interaction and user contributions, which assist the online buying and selling of products and services [5, 10-14].

As the previous discussion illustrates various flavors of social commerce exist, due to different settings as well as the different types of stakeholders involved. This paper takes the position that business activities by both sellers and customers should be considered when defining social commerce, as commerce by its very nature involves both parties. Therefore, the community of shoppers approach and the use of social media to assist commerce identified in the previous discussion were adapted as a working definition. For the purpose of this paper, social commerce will be defined as an online selling and buying activities using social media technologies and/or platforms.

2. Background of the study: Lifestyle Bloggers Community

This paper explores the social commerce activities of a community of lifestyle bloggers (i.e. monetization of personal blogging) [15], who are a subset of the Malaysian blogosphere community. Hopkins [15] claims that lifestyle bloggers start off their blogs by using a 'personal' genre - i.e. diary-based accounts of individuals’ lives. They initially develop their own
community within the same circle of followers. Those bloggers who attract a large number of readers by sharing their personal lives with readers may then evolve into social commerce as a result of getting paid by advertisers for a proportion of advertising space and advertorials in their blogs. On top of the advertising, they may also sell goods (e.g.: apparel food, electronics etc.) and services (e.g.: make-up artist, event planner etc.) via their blogs. The past 7-8 years has seen a significant growth in the number of micro businesses in this virtual lifestyle community.

There are two types of sellers in the community; those bloggers who already owned a small business before becoming personal bloggers and those who venture into business as a result of becoming a personal blogger. The characteristic of blogging’s ease of use means there are low barriers to starting to sell products to followers and other bloggers in the community. An online store can be conveniently set up without any cost, merging blogging and business into one. Other social media such as Facebook and Instagram are also commonly used.

This paper uncovers the motivations of micro business owners, who venture into social commerce and shows how their participation in a virtual community affects those motivations. The research questions for this paper are: (i) What are the main activities the sellers (bloggers) engage in the social commerce, and (ii) What are the factors that contribute to the sellers’ (bloggers) decision to participate in social commerce?

3. Social Commerce and Virtual Community

Though social commerce has evolved quickly in practice, it has gained little attention in the IS discipline compared to other IS fields [5]. According to Turban, et al. [11], previous academic research has addressed issues related to the adoption and use of social commerce such as theoretical, conceptual and technical boundaries [16], social software issues [17], and virtual communities and networks [18]. Although the opportunities associated with social commerce have generated significant interest for both researchers and practitioners [19], most discussions about social commerce have come from the practitioners’ point of view.

In addition, Augar & Zeleznikow [20] argue that the majority of social commerce related research has focused on medium to large organizations. We also found evidence from previous work focusing on medium to large organization to support Augar & Zeleznikow’s claim [6, 21-23]. Furthermore, there are a rising number of research articles focusing on customers in social commerce [13, 24-28] but very few on microbusinesses or individual sellers.

Amongst important findings from the social commerce studies of medium to large organizations are the following points (i) the use of social media mainly to support customer engagement or promotional tools rather than for transactional social commerce (i.e. order, payment etc.) [29-31], and (ii) firms were still struggling to link customer participation in social commerce to revenue performance [32-34]

Much less is known about the way micro businesses operate as compared to larger organizations, with more resources and better known reputations. Although there are some studies that focus on why and how small businesses are using social media, we argue that there are further areas that need to be explored in order to fully understand the roles and influences of social media adoption in micro businesses, particularly in the area of virtual community participation which plays an irreplaceable role in the realization of the value of e-commerce [35]. This awareness of the role of the virtual community in e-commerce led us to explore the factors that contribute to the motivation of those who venture into social commerce.

Previous studies have shown that relationships in the virtual community and the social support they provide, are amongst the most popular reasons why people join a virtual community [36], they have also been found to be play a critical role in social commerce participation [10, 37]. The interactivity achieved provides a way for individuals to search for and to communicate with others for the purpose of establishing and continuing friendships in a virtual community [36]. The more they interact, the more likely they are to form close relationships and the more positive this interaction, the stronger the bond developed. This is similar to the concept for sense of virtual community (SOVC) theory.

SOVC theory evolved from sense of community (SOC) theory developed by McMillan [38]. Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together [38]. Koh and Kim [39] have further investigated SOC and found that although SOC components exist in SOVC, nonetheless, the components vary based on different virtual communities. They suggest the components of SOVC, which are most important include (i) membership (feeling of belonging to a virtual community), (ii) influence (members’ perception of impact on the community and amount of influence the community has over them), and (iii) immersion (holistic sensation
that people feel when the act with total involvement caused by human-machine interaction).

Meanwhile, social support refers to members’ experiences of being cared for, being responded to, and being helped by members. There are four types of social support, which include (i) emotional support (expressions of empathy, love, trust and caring), (ii) instrumental support (tangible aid and service), (iii) informational support (advice, suggestions, and information) and (iv) appraisal support (provides information that is useful for self-evaluation) [40-44].

However, these important findings (i.e. virtual community relationship; social support) currently only relate to the customers, not the sellers. The role of the relationship between the virtual community and social support on the intention of sellers to participate remains unknown. We argue that sellers, who actively participate in a virtual community, are also likely to be influenced by these two factors.

4. Research Methodology

In an effort to answer the research questions, we conducted interviews with 21 lifestyle bloggers who participate actively in the community and each have more than 1000 followers. The participants chosen are those who sell to the community using their blogs and/or other social media platforms. The participants will be denoted as sellers for the remainder of this paper. They were selected based on observations conducted in order to understand the selected community (i.e. their activities; communication etc.) in phase one of the research. In this phase, the researcher observed related activities carried out within the community in order to select suitable virtual communities, as well as to set the boundaries for this research. This included understanding the members and their level of participation, understanding characteristics of social commerce virtual communities (e.g. patterns of interaction; fluid communication - different degree of virtualness, sometimes facilitated via face-to-face encounter) and the activities in the community.

In phase two, data was gathered using the laddering technique. Laddering is an in-depth interviewing technique used to develop an understanding of how consumers translate the attributes of products and services into meaningful associations with respect to self [45]. Based on Reynolds & Gutman’s [45] works the laddering technique involves a tailored interviewing format using primarily a series of directed probes in order to reveal customers’ motives for choosing any particular product or service [46].

Laddering adapts means-end theory, which was originally a framework for comprehensively representing the consumer meanings that underlie product-positioning [47]. By adapting means-end-theory, the laddering technique uses a hierarchical organization of consumer perceptions and product knowledge to get to the root reason for the purchase [45, 48], which includes (i) product’s attribute (Attribute), (ii) consequences of product use (Consequence) and (iii) individuals’ values (Core Values).

Veludo-de-Oliveira et al. [49] claim that the technique originally started off in the field of psychology when Hinkle [50] developed a technique to model people’s belief structures in a simple, systematic way, in order to establish individual’s super-ordinate personal constructs. According to Rugg et al. [51], the technique has been adapted by marketing, advertising, architecture, information technology, and organizational management researchers. For this research, the technique was adapted to identify the factors that contribute to the motivation behind sellers’ participation in social commerce. The reason why we choose laddering is because it allows us to derive a unique perspective based on the personal meaning of sellers’ participation as it provides a much richer understanding of the problem, rather than a general reported description as in a typical semi-structured interview. By using laddering, it is easier to link each factor listed by the sellers.

In order to conduct laddering, firstly, we needed to determine the attributes which would be used as a starting point for the laddering technique. This is called the elicitation technique. We combined two elicitation techniques which were (i) to choose from a list; and (ii) free elicitation. For the first technique, participants were asked to choose from a list of potential activities in social commerce that were generated from the observation phase. These included (i) selling, (ii) product review, (iii) product advice, (iv) sharing business idea, and (v) business coaching. Participants were asked to pick one or more activities in social commerce as the ones that they most frequently participated in. The free elicitation technique was also used to encourage them to add on their own preferences on top of the activities itemized in the list. On top of activities listed from the observation, they also added some other activities such as (i) after sales service consultation, and (ii) promoting other businesses (free/paid advertisement).

Next, based on their answers, which were denoted as attributes; the participants were pushed up the ladder by asking “why” questions. For example: Why is it (the attribute) important to you? In this research, the questions started as follows: Why <name of activity> via blog or social media to the community members is important to you? This stage was followed by probing
questions that examined some of the consequences associated with the attributes [48] until the values behind each of the activities are clear. Refer table 1 for a sample of interview questions.

Once the data was finalized, it was analysed using three main steps (i) content analysis, (ii) construction of implication matrix, and (iii) development of hierarchical value map. The construction of the implication matrix and hierarchical value map were carried out using Ladderux software.

4.1. Content Analysis

Content analysis for laddering serves to reduce the raw data in order to facilitate interpretation. It consists of two steps: data reduction and categorization. Data reduction involves the coding of each interview transcript and the development of constructs. Table 1 shows the laddering interview excerpts and the coding process.

Table 1: Ladder transcriptions and coding example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcriptions</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why did you write the review?</td>
<td>[Request from members]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>There is a demand for it from the followers. That's a normal thing in this community.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is it important for you to fulfil their demand?</td>
<td>[New followers]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I think it can lead me to new followers, especially when people use the Google search on any particular product, so they may end up reading my blog.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is that important about having new followers?</td>
<td>[Potential buyer]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I think of every new followers as a potential buyer. It is important to have a customer who is also a follower in order to keep them coming to my blogshop and keep on buying product.</em></td>
<td>[Customer Engagement]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is that important?</td>
<td>[Business sustainability]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>It will help me to keep running my business.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After data reduction, a categorization process was conducted in order to sort the constructs into different dimensions. This was done by first classifying all responses into the three basic A/C/V (Attributes/Consequences/Values) levels. The total numbers of ladders constructed for 21 sellers was 41. As the ladders are based on the activities listed by the sellers, one seller would have at least one and at most three activities, hence explaining why the number of ladders is greater than the number of participant. Table 2 shows an example of A-C-V classifications and the ladders.

Table 2. A-C-V classification and ladders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values (V)</td>
<td>Business sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences (C)</td>
<td>Customer Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences (C)</td>
<td>Potential buyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences (C)</td>
<td>New followers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences (C)</td>
<td>Request from members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributes (A)</td>
<td>Product Review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2. Construction of Implication Matrix

The implication matrix displays the number of times each element links to every other element in the same ladder [52]. In other words, it is used to summarise the connections between each attribute, consequence, and value element.

There are two types of connections that exist between elements: (i) direct and (ii) indirect relations. In A-C-V ladders, a direct connection between two elements exists when one element has a direct link to the other element, without any intermediary elements in the same ladder. Meanwhile, an indirect link between two elements occurs when the two elements are mentioned in the same ladder, but separated by one or more intermediary elements. Both direct and indirect links are shown on the snapshot of the implication matrix in Table 3.

The direct linkages appear on the left of the decimal point and indirect links on the right. For example, the relationship between ‘Selling’ and ‘Social Support’ is equal to 5.07. This means ‘Selling’ has both a direct and an indirect relationship with Social Support’ with 12 total linkages. The number ‘5’ represents the number of direct relationships, whilst the number ‘.07’ shows the existence of indirect relationships.

Table 3. Snapshot of Implication Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPLICATION MATRIX</th>
<th>Selling</th>
<th>Review</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Social Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selling</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review</td>
<td>8.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3. Development of Hierarchical Value Map (HVM)

Once the implication matrix was completed, the data was converted to construct the hierarchical value map (HVM). HVM demonstrates the relationships between concepts by showing the links between the attributes, consequences, and values. To construct a HVM from the implication matrix, adjacent relations needed to be developed. Adjacent relations were formed based on the situation: if A→B and B→C and C→D, then a chain A-B-C-D is formed [45].

A HVM is gradually built up by connecting all the chains by considering the linkages in the implication matrix. Each number on the maps is derived from the implication matrix. Usually, the HVM does not display all the elements and linkages in the implication matrix. A cut-off of 5 was selected as suggested by Reynolds & Gutman [45]. Thus, only the relation values above the cut-off level were considered. For example, in the HVM (Refer Figure 1), it shows a relation of ‘3.08’ for selling and perceived convenience relationship. This value (3.08) defines 11 linkages for the relationship, with 3 direct and 8 indirect linkages, which mean the relationship has more than 5 cut-off values. From 24 elements, only 10 elements were left in the HWM. The relationship chains from the HVM will be explained in Section 5.

5. Findings

We found that the main business-related activities carried out by sellers in the blogosphere community are (i) selling and (ii) product reviews. The goals for these activities are (i) profit, (ii) business sustainability, (iii) cost-effectiveness, and (iv) self-esteem.

We extracted the relationship chains (A to V) from the HVM, in order to discuss the findings. The chains were mined based on the main motivations mentioned before. Data from semi-structured interviews was also used to support the findings. The next sub-section will discuss the findings based on the relationship chains.

5.1. Selling → Profit chain

Figure 1 illustrates the ‘Selling → Profit’ chain. There are three main factors for sellers to achieve “Profit”, which is the main motivation for this chain. Looking closely at the HVM, it shows that the main factors are: (i) member, (ii) social support, and (ii) perceived convenience.

“Members” in this context represented the act of members’ requests. The sellers claimed that the community members’ requests for them to sell to the community were one of the reasons they started selling to the community. Participant S7 said “Actually it started with a request from readers. They want the same stuff that I am wearing, hence they ask me to sell it to them.”

Figure 1. HVM: The Selling → Profit Chains

Sellers believed that fulfilling these requests would grant them more “Business opportunity” to reach for a “Profit”. Participant S1 states “…and if you spend enough time in this community you can see that most bloggers sell something because they know they can attract their readers” The findings show that sellers see an opportunity because there are demands from members of the community. It also shows that the community members are interested to buy from other members in the community.

The second factor is “Social Support”. Participant S13 states that “The community usually will support any members who venture into new business. They are willing to help you promote your business and even willing to buy it even though they don’t really need it.”

As evidenced in the selected interview excerpts, we found that sellers were motivated to venture into social commerce because they can see the support from the community that eventually will help them to promote the business, to give some moral support related to the business and even purchasing the product to show their support. Participant S16 claims that “This is actually related to the support from the community. Because of heart-warming response and support from them, I can actually see there’s an opportunity for me to start my business”.

The last influential factor of this chain is “Perceived Convenience”. Perceived convenience refers to the perception of the sellers when the situation or selling process lowers the cognitive, emotional and
physical burdens for them. According to Participant S1, “I think it will be easier to do the marketing because most of my readers subscribed to my blog and they also followed my Instagram and they are also in my Facebook. So basically I just need to update about the product in my social media”. Participant S2 mentions about the ease of use: “It’s really easy to use the apps” whilst Participant S14 states about better communication: “I think it makes easy for me to communicate with the customer”.

Based on the findings, the perceived convenience basically includes the ease of use of social media apps, better communications and easy access to target “Potential Buyers”. From the sellers’ perspective, the availability of potential buyers is most likely to influence the “Business Opportunity”.

In conclusion, this chain shows that the business opportunity is an important element that needs to be targeted in order to achieve “Profit” from “Selling” activities in social commerce.

5.2. Selling → Business Sustainability Chain

The ‘Selling → Business Sustainability’ chain is shown in Figure 2, the relationship of selling and business sustainability is strongly influenced by the “Perceived Convenience”, which leads to the “Potential Buyers” in the community. We believe the situation is related to the previous discussion on perceived convenience in the ‘Selling → Profit’ chain.

This shows that the sellers realized the potential of using blogs and/or social media to sustain their business. Other than that there also an unknown factors that indirectly influence the “Business Sustainability” from selling in social media.

5.3. Selling → Cost-Effective Chain

The ‘Selling → Cost-Effective’ chain (Refer to Figure 3) clearly shows that the motivation to venture into social commerce is because of the low operational cost of social media applications.

Cost-Effective is defined as being economical in terms of what is received for the money spent on the business. This includes low operational costs and low marketing costs. However factors that may contribute to “Cost-Effective” values are unknown. This is likely due to divergence of specific factors perceived by the sellers in the community.

5.4. Selling → Self Esteem Chain

Self-esteem refers to the evaluative dimension of the self that includes feelings of worthiness, pride and discouragement. As shown in Figure 4, the ‘Selling → Self-Esteem’ chain has an indirect relationship and factors contributing to this remain unknown. This is similar to the ‘Selling → Cost-Effective’ chain. The factors contributing to the achievement of “Self-Esteem” are different for the sellers in this community.
In this section, sellers claim that they are more confident about doing business because of the low marketing costs and low risk. Participant S2 said: “I think I am confident enough to run my business.” On the other hand, Participant S5 states that: “I am afraid that if I failed, people will look down on me, so it’s better to start small but steadily rather than aiming big without solid plan.”

As shown in Figure 4, there is a low relationship with indirect linkage (0.06) between selling and self-esteem. Therefore, we argue that self-esteem is not the main motivation for sellers to venture in social commerce. Nonetheless this finding shows that there is evidence of sellers starting the business because of their confidence in using the technologies.

5.5. Product Review ➔ Profit Chain

Figure 5 shows the ‘Product review ➔ Profit’ chain. Product review in this paper is defined as a review of goods and/or services used by the sellers in their daily lives. This includes goods and services provided by other sellers, be it sellers from the community or other sellers outside the community.

Most of the sellers do the product reviews because of requests from the members as shown in the interview excerpts. Participants S14 states “There are demands of it. The readers wanted to know my point of view of certain product”, whilst Participant S16 claims “Readers sent me emails and text asking me to do some review”.

![Figure 5. HVM: The Product review ➔ profit chain](image)

Sellers are aware of the importance of fulfilling members’ requests in order to obtain more business opportunities. This is because when sellers complete product reviews, they may be able to attract attention from people who are searching for specific product reviews via a Google search. Participant S5 claims: “I think it can lead me to potential customers especially when people doing the Google search about product review they will end up to find my blog”.

Furthermore, sellers also anticipate that the review will be shared by followers and may potentially go viral in social media. This creates the potential for them to get new followers and/or buyers, which in turn creates new business opportunities. This is supported by Participant S2: “It works like this. When you made a good review, usually your followers will share the review on their social media sites. Sometimes it went viral so with that I get new followers. And because I am a seller, this benefits me in term of more opportunity to expand my business.”

6. Discussion

The sellers’ main motivations for participating in social commerce were to make a profit for their business and to sustain the business. Factors that led to these motivations were generally the business opportunities offered by social commerce. The question is what creates those opportunities? As evidenced in the findings section, the paper found that the sense of virtual community as shown by the members’ support for the sellers has a significant influence. Participation in a virtual community by a microbusiness owner can have a significant impact on their business because of the strong support given by other community members to their businesses. Note that this group of sellers are lifestyle bloggers, who on average have more than 1000 followers. We found that there are three types of social support as suggested by [40-44] which include emotional support, instrumental support and informational support. This finding extends the study by Liang et al. [10] and Wang & Hajli [53] by explaining the role of social support in virtual communities on sellers’ participation in social commerce. It is suggested that the strong social support provided by virtual communities is likely to create business opportunities for the sellers within that community.

Blanchard & Marcus [54] claim that virtual community members may experience various levels of attachment to the community as a whole. Attachment to the community is more than relationships with other individual members. This can lead to obligations where members who have experienced various levels of support feel they have an obligation to give something back to the community. This paper confirms the findings by Blanchard & Marcus [54] and Koh & Kim [39] where sellers acknowledge that their participation in virtual communities has developed SOVC within that community. Therefore from the sellers’ point of view, the customers feel obligated to provide support
to their business because of the sense of membership, influence and immersion in the community.

Our study also found that “Cost Effective” is not the main motivation for sellers to venture into social commerce. This gives more insight to our claim related to the sense of virtual community. The ‘Selling – Cost Effective’ chain supports our argument that the community is likely to have a strong sense of virtual community and operational cost is no longer the main factor for sellers who are considering social commerce. However this argument needs further research on the customers’ side as the data from the sellers’ side is likely to be biased towards their perceptions.

There is some evidence supporting “Self-Esteem” as one of the motivations for participation, however there is a low probability that the factors for “Self-Esteem” are related to their participation in the community as with the other motivations (i.e. Profit and Business Sustainability). The feelings of self-confidence are likely to be due to the ease of use of the technology. However, there are no strong indicators for either factor. This explains the indirect linkage of 0.06 between “Selling” and “Self-Esteem” which indicates the low frequency of these factors for inspiring motivation.

We also found that the technological aspect may have some degree of influence on the motivations of the sellers as claimed in the findings section. The ease of use of social media applications leads to perceived convenience and is likely to influence them to venture into social commerce. This is also supported by the evidence from the chain. Sellers also realized there was an opportunity to promote their business by utilizing Google search capabilities. They decided to do product reviews in order to attract more traffic to their blogs.

There are many models of social commerce implemented by businesses, most usually use social media as part of their marketing strategy to attract more customers with the goal of making more profits. When customers ‘Like’ a Facebook page, or follow their Instagram, it shows that they have successfully connected to their customers. However, one question remains unanswered, “how to turn those likes into sale?” We found that it takes more than a social media page to persuade customers to make a purchase. This is where the sense of virtual community plays its part. Larger businesses lack this advantage. As found by Heller Baird & Parasnis [29], there is a perception gap between businesses and customers. Though businesses think that customers are interacting with them because they feel connected to brand, customers in fact are only interested in getting a discount. However, sellers in the blogosphere community do have the advantage of being genuinely connected with their customers.

7. Implications and Future Works

This paper is significant for social commerce research and those practitioners who venture into this marketplace. These findings provide a useful insight for businesses, regardless of their size to build an understanding of the need to create a good relationship with their customers. For macro businesses, this model can be used to identify what is lacking in their social media marketing strategy.

The contribution to theory is a fuller understanding of the relationship between sellers’ participation in virtual community and how it affects their participation in social commerce. In addition, this paper has also focused on a different type of social commerce setting which has not been widely researched by social commerce scholars. It can give new insights to scholars undertaking new studies on diverse types of social commerce settings in different countries rather than only focusing on brand communities.

The next step will be to carry out a similar study with the customers in the same community in order to compare the views from the customers with the sellers. Does what was perceived by sellers tally with customers’ point of view? Future research will also address the co-creation activities in the community in order to dig deeper into what other elements influence participation.

9. Conclusion

In this paper, we seek a deeper understanding of the reasons underlying micro businesses decision to participate in social commerce. The findings show that community engagement creates social support from other community members which in turn creates more opportunities for micro businesses to grow and motivates them to participate in selling and product review activities. It is hoped that the findings will help both researchers and practitioners working in the area of social commerce to have a better understanding of the phenomenon.

10. References


